

FBI Doffing White Shirts

Agents Now a Riot of Color

5-23-72

By Jon Katz

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The agent stood in front of the FBI field office in the Old Post Office Building at 12th Street and Pennsylvania Avenue NW, in Washington. He looked quickly over his shoulder, smiled down on his bright yellow shirt, and winked.

"This is my first yellow shirt," he confided. "Just stand here awhile. You'll see others."

Two weeks ago, Acting FBI Director Patrick Gray III said agents in the FBI's Washington office had reacted like a group of schoolboys released when he told

them that "I have no hang-ups about white shirts."

what he called the tight "grooming and appearance standards" that required bureau agents to wear white shirts and to maintain short sideburns and close-cropped hair, Gray's proposed regulations also will permit FBI agents to have sideburns down to the ear and hair down to the shirt collar.

Yesterday, a check of agents' attire here and in other cities indicated that agents of the FBI have indeed brightened up their attire, particularly their shirts and ties, although they still

present a neat conservative appearance.

FBI officials sharply disagreed with the statements of agents indicating that colored shirts were discouraged prior to the death of former FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover and that dress styles of agents have become more liberal.

"This whole thing was an invention of the newspapers" said Assistant FBI Director Thomas E. Bishop yesterday. Bishop said agents always have been free to wear colored shirts, and that he had for years.

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FBI Agents Revel In Colored Shirts

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An FBI spokesman agreed with Bishop, claiming that agents were never told to wear white shirts under Hoover's leadership, and that many didn't.

Agents disagreed.

One, stationed in the FBI's Washington office, said he was wearing a blue shirt this week, the first time he had worn anything but a white shirt.

The agents questioned, all of whom asked that their names not be used, said that while they were never ordered to wear white, most believed it was preferred by the FBI's hierarchy.

"Nobody ever told me not to," said an agent in the Philadelphia field office, "but I didn't see too many people wearing them (colored shirts)."

The agents said they always were led to believe, from the time they attended FBI school, that the ideal FBI agent would look like a conservatively-dressed businessman with a suit, a dark tie and white shirt and neat, closely cropped hair.

Agents said there has been a dramatic increase in the number of coworkers who suddenly have taken to brightly-colored shirts and ties.

One man stepped out of the field office here yester-

day in a brown knit suit with a yellow and green striped shirt and a green tie.

He admitted to being an agent, but would only say, "I didn't wear this suit to work before."

An agent in the FBI's Baltimore office confided that he's been wearing a blue shirt for years, "but it was always my understanding white shirts would be worn if there was an inspection or something."

The agent in Philadelphia said that in more remote FBI field offices away from large cities, colored shirts always have been worn, but that in large bureaus, the dress more often was white.

Three agents in the Washington Field Office said they had rarely worn anything but white shirts, and were ecstatic with the new director's attitude.

All of the agents questioned said that they had never heard of anyone being punished or reprimanded for wearing colored shirts, but that "it was just an assumed thing" among many agents that they shouldn't.

Mr. Hoover was personally known to favor white shirts, and some agents said it was probably a case of underlings attempting to please him.